in which dried fish, raw meat, ghee butter and other foodstuffs are openly displayed. These goods are always black with flies and as one drives through the narrow streets of the shopping centre a black, buzzing cloud obscures the windscreen. In summer it is much worse. The Arabs are curiously indifferent to this plague of dirt, bad odour and insects, and will sit for hours outside the shops, idly gossiping, while flies settle on their beards and faces, fall into their Turkish tea, or get mixed up with their rice. It is almost impossible not to swallow flies when one is talking, and the only remedy when in these districts is to keep one's mouth tightly shut. I have seen Arab babies lying in the open air, their eyes swollen and festered from some disease and covered with flies. Trachoma and cataract are common troubles among the Arabs, and it is surprising that epidemics of typhoid and dysentery are not frequent.

The blame for this state of affairs cannot be laid on the Arab peasantry, who are illiterate, badly paid and poorly nourished. They have been brought up for centuries in primitive surroundings and have come to regard their way of life as natural and even congenial. It is curious that where the poorer class of Arab has come into close contact with the American or Englishman he has imitated, in a bizarre and comic fashion, the Western style of dress, but he has stopped short at the more important aspects of our civilization. Perhaps, in his present state of culture, the Arab has an ingrained scorn of sanitation and health. By disposition, and owing to the intense heat of the summer months, he is a lazy individual, judged by our standards, working only when he must or when the fancy takes him. But there are deeper reasons for the Arab's tolerance of dirt and disease. To say that his attitude is inborn, as some visitors to the Middle East are prone to do, is begging the question.

The Arab has some admirable virtues, not the least of which is his strong sense of hospitality and charity. The poor man seldom goes away empty-handed, and the visitor is always sure of a meal, a resting-place for the night, and coffee. If not always strictly truthful, the Arab is unfailingly polite and his courteous manners would often put a European to shame. He has outstanding courage, particularly in battle, and despises meanness and immorality. He is frugal, kindly unless his fierce pride and spirit of independence are upset, and intensely religious. Indeed, what impressed me most about the Arabs of all classes was their extreme devotion to the faith of the Prophet, and their realistic interpretation of the Koran, which means more to them in their daily lives than the Bible means

[Shi 'hou]

sheikh's name and address in Arabic, and a statement in the same language to the effect that the bearer had his permission to travel through Oman without let or hindrance. It also offered dire penalties, including the amputation of the right hand, to any who dared to show violence to the bearer. Unfolding this rather dirty piece of paper I handed it to the headman. He held it gingerly in his fingers, gazing at it suspiciously, and pretended to read it although it was upside down. With a shrug he then handed it to another tribesman, but this man could make nothing of the document either.

Although they could not understand Arabic script, I think they must have had some inkling of its meaning, for they began a violent altercation amongst themselves. One of them suddenly pointed in the direction of Ras-al-Khaimah, and then at us. Beginning to get rather tired of all this pantomime, I decided to take decisive measures. There is a rule in the desert, at least among the Bedouins, that if you are attacked you should seize the garment of the most respectable Arab and cry: '*Daheel*', which means 'protection'. Under the unwritten laws of Arab hospitality, he is obliged to keep you in safe custody for at least twenty-four hours. The principle is not unlike that obtaining in the Middle Ages, when the outlaw could enter a church and claim sanctuary from the clergy.

I had no idea how it would work with the *Shi'hou*, but I was determined to try. Dashing forward I seized the scanty hem of the headman's *kufiyeh* and yelled '*Daheel*' at the top of my voice. To my surprise the old man's face was suddenly contorted with fear, and he stepped back as though I had struck him a blow. His rapid action resulted in a piece of the rotten cloth coming away in my hands and he was left almost naked. The effect of his predicament on the other *Shi'hou* was astonishing. At first amazement, then amusement, was written on their faces. Some grinned widely, others burst into shrieks of laughter. Even the headman, who had covered up his bare limbs as best he could with a few shreds of cloth, was grinning sheepishly. All signs of hostility had vanished. With a gesture the headman beckoned us towards the hut from which the shrieking woman had emerged.

Closely followed by a still laughing bodyguard, we marched towards the hut. The headman entered first, directing us to follow him. It was dark and dirty inside as well as hot and foul-smelling. Our hosts squatted on the bare floor in a circle, which we joined.

ment of 'the hooks'. A thief condemned to this terrible sentence may well blench. He is dropped from a high wall or tower on to sharp hooks which project from the wall. With his limbs securely skewered, he is left hanging in the pitiless sun until the vultures end his misery, leaving a whitened skeleton as a warning to wantons. Influential prisoners are cast into the palace dungeons without light or food, and garrotted quietly in the night by their gaolers. Branding and flogging are also common forms of punishment in Arabia.

A fair amount of desert raiding is still carried on in the Jebel Shamailiyah district, the range of mountains between Oman and Muscat, and at Sinash, a lonely town in the hills, the *Wali*, or Sultan's Viceroy, has been obliged to use draconian means of dealing with brigands, who sometimes resort to ransom and are a menace to peaceful merchants who use the pass. Not long ago one of the Sultan's brothers was abducted and carried off into the hills. The ransom demanded—a heavy one—was paid, but a year later the ringleader and several of his men were caught by the Sultan's trackers. They suffered some unpleasant tortures before they were finally put out of their sufferings by being hanged. Their property was confiscated and their unfortunate relatives were obliged to pay several time the amount of the ransom. Crime does not pay in Arabia, unless you are on the winning side. Yet the bandit and the camel raider persist in their vocations in spite of all discouragement. The Arab is prepared to fight—to the death, if necessary, for that which he steals, and this is a spirit which all Arabs admire.

Young Arab boys and girls, as well as slaves and Persian servants, are sometimes carried off by the raiders, and at one time I was obliged to provide an armed guard for the Fort bearers, as they were terrified to return to Sharjah at night, a distance of one mile, unless accompanied. Haider, my personal bearer, a youth of fifteen, told me that he had once been attacked at night, and for a time I allowed him to sleep in one of the mess rooms. High prices are fetched in the slave market for young people, who are sold to merchants or pearling fleet owners and treated little better than negro slaves. A fifteen years old Persian boy may fetch as much as 2,000 rupees, and a girl about 1,500. Negroes fetch only half this amount. The British authorities are aware that a traffic in slaves is carried on in Oman, but claim that they have been unable to obtain any evidence of it. Since I have met slaves who complained to me that they had been abducted and sold in the market, and once